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ABSTRACT

SwampLog is a type of journal keeping that records the facts of daily activities as experienced and perceived by practitioners. The label, "SwampLog," was inspired by Donald Schon's metaphor used to distinguish the "swamplands of practice" from the "high, hard ground of research." Keeping a SwampLog consists of recording four general types of journal entries, each distinguished by its own purpose. The general entry types are: (1) daily log entries serve as an ongoing record of daily events and receptacles for the observations, insights, and feelings that make up daily practice; (2) summary log entries are journal notations that draw together into summary format the recent past events of practice and are intended to help bring clarity and focus to those events; (3) reflections and explorations are entries intended to help develop understanding about the implications of experience; and (4) steppingstones entries propose actions through a written plan that is realistic. When used by colleagues as part of an ongoing and collaborative inquiry group, structured journalizing can encourage individual and organizational renewal. Some principles of journal keeping in collaborative environments are: (1) using the journal frequently over a long period of time; (2) writing honestly in an unpremeditated fashion; (3) rereading the journal often; and (4) keeping journals private unless one willingly reads aloud for group work. This paper contains 62 references. (KS)

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SwampLog //: A Structured Journal for Personal and Professional Inquiry Within a Collaborative Environment [1]

INTRODUCTION

The SwampLog is a journal intended to serve as a sourcebook of the facts of daily practice as experienced and perceived by practitioners within the context of their own professional activities. Because the journal, like a diary, is a written document constructed by the practitioner over time, it can help render intelligible the often messy and confusing array of complex interactions of daily events by pointing to regularities, limits, and possibilities of work situations, the individuals within those situations, and the symbiotic relationship between the two. When used with colleagues as part of an ongoing discussion group, the SwampLog can also help surface the insights of individual participants and make available to the entire group their work related understandings--their skills, their knowledge, their biases, their values, their wisdom, their commitments. These personal attributes are a significant resource in collective problem solving and in the accomplishment of individual and organizational goals. SwampLog may thus function to help foster individual and organizational development.

The label, "SwampLog," was inspired by Donald Schon's (1987) metaphor used to distinguish the *swamplands of practice* from the *high, hard ground of research*. The high, hard ground of research emphasizes technical, rational approaches to problem solving in which professionals apply theory and research results to the accomplishment of clearly specified outcomes. In the extreme view, practitioners are thought of as expert technicians who apply proven methods (*best practices*) to solve important problems. Many, if not most, professionals in the social sciences, human service professions, and education have been trained in this approach to decision making and action. It is an artifact of a rational, scientific, industrial world view.

In the swamplands of practice, on the other hand, problems of interest tend to be ill-formed, messy, and often defy technical solutions due to the complex interactions of economic, social, psychological, and political forces. The simple application of *best practices* is often insufficient for the satisfactory solution of complex, context-specific problems. A process of *reflection-in-action,* typified by self-reflective inquiry and collaborative problem framing, is often necessary to establish coherence and direction within the problem context. This process relies on the task related skills, knowledge, and insight of participants, is characterized by improvisation in setting viable courses of action, and is sustained by monitoring-and-tailoring as a means of refining performance over time. Reflection-in-action takes many forms and is known by a variety of names including: cooperative inquiry, participatory research, dialogic inquiry, collaborative inquiry, action science, action research, experiential research (Reason, 1988, 1,2); critical inquiry (Sirotnik, 1987); and decision oriented educational research (Cooley & Bickel, 1986). Because a major source of learning for both new and experienced educators is *within the school itself* (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988, p. 5), the skillful use of reflection-in-action can contribute significantly to school improvement and renewal. It has been argued by some that school renewal is, in fact, the process of critical inquiry (reflection-in-action) itself (Sirtonik, 1987, p. 42).

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One implication of the above thoughts is that reflection-in-action might be fostered through use of an empirical method or tool other than one designed for the laboratory, a tool that would enable professionals to investigate important problems of practice under circumstances of imprecision and flux. We might anticipate that any such tool intended for use by practitioners would have to be flexible enough to fit into the rapidly changing circumstances of their day's work, yet structured enough to provide information about themselves, their organizations, and the intersection of these personal and social domains. SwampLog // is the revised version of an attempt to create such a tool. It is hoped that it will eventually provide an opportunity to foster, within the user, a certain perspective or imaginative point of view, one that sociologist, C. Wright Mills referred to long ago as "...a quality of mind that seems most dramatically to promise an understanding of the intimate realities of ourselves in connection with larger social realities " (Mills, 1959, p. 15).

Structured journalling as intended by SwampLog // evolved after reviewing various literatures including the following: *action research* (Dowhower, Melvin & Sizemore, 1990; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988a, 1988b; Miller & Pine, 1990); *critical inquiry* (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Giroux, 1983; Sirotnik, 1984, 1987); *collaborative inquiry* (Grumet, 1989; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Nicassio, Houchin, Johnson, Withycombe, Leidall, Vann, Anderson, Fellows, Adams, & Brown, 1985; Reason, 1988); *practitioner/ researcher models of inquiry and change* (Barlow, Hayes & Nelson, 1984; Butler, 1989; Gosswami & Stillman, 1987; Hersen & Barlow, 1976; Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1989; Mohr & MacLean, 1987; O'Donohue, 1989; Schon, 1987); concepts related to *curriculum and instruction, instructional supervision, educational environments and change, and alternate forms of educational research* (Casanova, 1989; Cooley & Bickel, 1986; Duckworth, 1987; Field & Hill, 1988; Garman, 1986; George, 1990; Goodlad, 1984; Grumet, 1989; Guba, 1990; Guba & Lincoln, 1981/1987, 1989; Heckman, 1987; Joyce, Hersch & McKibbin, 1983; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nolan & Huber, 1989; Patton, 1990; Perry-Sheldon & Allain, 1987; Sergiovanni, 1985; Sirotnik & Clark, 1988; Staton, 1985, 1987; Turner-Muecke, Russell & Bowyer, 1986; Wigginton, 1986); *popular self-help psychology* (Capacchione, 1979, 1982; Glouberman, 1989; Moore, 1989; Rogers, 1988); and the human potential interests expressed by *holistic depth psychology* (Kaiser, 1981; Peterson, 1982; Progoff, 1975, 1980, 1983; Tart, 1990; van Manen, 1990).

It is intended that through sustained and consistent use of the structured journal to be described below, practitioners will become:

√...better observers of themselves as individuals and as educators.
√...better observers of the educational environments in which they work.
√...better able to write about and reflect upon the daily experiences that go into making up their professional practice.
√...better able to shape those daily experiences into personally, professionally, and organizationally productive plans and actions.
√...better able to more openly discuss with colleagues their personal observations about practice, their underlying motivations and feelings, and their work environments.
√...better able to be supportive of, and supported by, colleagues in creating positive conditions for change in professional practices.
√...better able to be supportive of, and supported by, colleagues in enhancing the teaching and learning environments in which students work.

An emphasis on nurturance of both the individual and the environment is intentional. It

derives from a belief that individuals and the contexts within which they operate depend upon each other for their definition and vitality; they are interdependent. Together, both individuals and circumstances shape various events, activities, and meanings that come to define the nature of educational contexts and of the individuals within them. This is significant, in that it is educators who are in the business of fostering the best in human development and learning. As collaborating journal keepers we hope to create a mutually supportive community of active learners who model the ideals of *participatory inquiry* for their students.

THE STRUCTURE OF SWAMPLOG //

The SampLog consists of four general types of journal entries, each distinguished by its own purpose. These four general entry types—which may be noted in the pages of a loose-leaf binder, a spiral notebook, or some other convenient blank book—are discussed below.

Daily Log Entries. The Daily Log entries serve as an ongoing record of daily events; receptacles for the observations, insights, and feelings that make up daily practice. Ideally, these entries would be made shortly after the events actually occur. When this is not possible, it is helpful to sit quietly for 10-15 minutes at the close of each day and, in a non-judgemental and unpremediated manner, note those aspects of the day that come immediately to mind. Entries should be brief and record what might be considered the empirical, descriptive, or *objective facts* of practice, and also the feelings, intuitions or *inner states* that are evoked.

The objective facts of practice are generally expressed as anecdotal descriptions of the events and activities of the day. These descriptions might even be formalized into the graphical data displays typical of behavioral interventionists. Inner states, on the other hand, are often embodied in our moods and in the unspoken thoughts we *catch ourselves* mulling over in our heads. Recording our inner states can make visible to us our own taken for granted assumptions. Through the act of recording, we transform tacit into propositional knowledge which may then be dealt with in a more direct manner. Inner states also appear as insights or "ah ha! " experiences. We record such insights because of their potential problem solving value, and because a series of smaller insights recorded over time may, in fact, coalesce into a *grand* solution of considerable significance. Attention to our inner selves increases our sensitivity to an important resource which may be drawn upon as we make our way through the swamplands of practice.

It is as Daily Log entries that we also note the history and unique points of view of our organizations as they present themselves to us during daily routine. We become sensitive observers and pay careful attention during meetings, during casual social conversations, and at other times when people share the past events, myths, crises, heroes, and villains of the organization. We do not judge the organization, we simply note our perceptions over a long period of time and thus create a record of the organization's history, mores, values--its culture. In this way we begin to create a sense of the organization within which we conduct our professional lives. Organizations, like individuals, unfold, evolve, and develop to meet changing demands. Positive changes in our own practice can only move forward in terms of both self and organizational integrity; recall our assumption that individuals and their contexts are symbiotically interdependent. In their brief summary of action research, Stephen Kemmis and Robin McTaggart indicate the significance of understanding the nature of the context within which professional practice is conducted. Their comments are worth noting in total:

> Action research involves people in making *critical analyses* of the situations (classrooms, schools, systems) in which they work: these

> situations are *structured* institutionally. The pattern of resistance an action researcher meets in changing his or her own practices is a pattern of conflicts between the new practices and the accepted practices of the institution (accepted practices of communication, decision making and educational work). By making a critical analysis of the institution, the action researcher can understand how resistances are rooted in conflicts between competing sets of practice, competing views of educational perspectives and values, and competing views of organisation and decision making. This critical understanding will help the action researcher to act politically towards overcoming resistances (for example, by involving others collaboratively in the research process, inviting others to explore their practices, or by working in the wider school context towards more rational educational understandings, more just processes of decision making, and more fulfilling forms of educational work for all involved). (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988a, p. 24).

To summarize, making brief Daily Log entries is a cumulative discipline which is intended to sensitize our powers of observation and intuition so that we might better understand the patterns of our own practice, the circumstances and values of the work place, and the interplay between the two. Our Daily Log entries make that understanding more likely, and help us maintain integrity in the relationship between our intended and actual practices. Our brief excerpts will be silently re-read by us prior to making Summary Log entries which are discussed next.

Summary Log Entries. Summary Log entries are journal notations that draw together into summary format the recent past events of our practice. They provide a condensed outline of the contents of daily experience and help us draw them into clearer focus.

There are several ways to proceed with the writing of a Summary Log entry. In my own work, collaborative inquiry groups engage in a re-reading, imaging, and writing exercise of about 40 minutes in length. After spending several minutes re-reading Daily Log entries, journal keepers are then guided, by means of imagery, to write: 1) a short *global impression* of the period covered by the Daily Log entries; 2) a short summary of the *contents* of worklife; 3) a short summary of the *people relationships* of practice; 4) a short summary of the *socio-cultural* aspects of practice; 5) a summary of the *physical aspects* of worklife; 6) a summary of *extraordinary or dramatic events*; and; 7) *reactions* to the six summary statements just written. This exercise was adapted from the work of Ira Progroff (1975) and is engaged in by journal keepers whenever there is a need to *sum up*.

A more direct approach is for journal keepers to simply re-read Daily Log entries as above, and then sit quietly, relax, focus attention on recent experiences, and write to complete the phrase, "This recent time has been a time when....." This phrase was developed by Progoff as part of his lengthy *Period Log* exercise from which the procedure described in the previous paragraph was adapted. Progoff (1975, 1980, 1983) as well as Capacchione (1979, 1982) should be consulted for excellent *summary* as well as other journal keeping ideas.

Reading-back (to one's self or into a taperecorder) is an important aspect of journal keeping. It is during read-back that people may report experiencing a more *holistic* sense of their life and work. New units of meaning and understanding may automatically coalesce into new wholes that are completely unexpected. It is only in retrospect that we are sometimes able to apprehend the unique patterns of our own personal thoughts and actions as well as the subtle regularities of the environments in which we work.

To reiterate, Summary Log entries are brief summaries intended to help bring clarity and focus to the recent events of professional life. They are our first step in strategically positioning ourselves somewhere between perceptions of the past and possibilities of the future.

Reflections and Explorations. Whereas the first two types of entries provide descriptions of lived experience, Reflections and Explorations are entries intended to help develop understanding about the implications of that experience. Reflection simply means *mindful thought* (critical thinking) whereas Exploration means the consideration of *alternative perspectives* (hypothesis generation, extrapolation). Reflections and Explorations are entries made whenever the journal keeper feels a need to *muck around and work it all out* ; a need to reflect on experiences, explore them for meaning, and create the canons that guide action. It is with Reflections and Explorations that we attempt to understand our professional practice from a new perspective. It is the *new perspective* that lies at the base of productive problem solution. Einstein and Infeld expressed long ago the truth of this for the growth of science:

> The formulation of a problem is far more often essential than its solution, which may be merely a matter of mathematical or experimental skill. To raise new questions, new possibilities, to regard old problems from a new angle requires creative imagination and marks real advance in science. (Quoted in Isaac & Michael, 1971, p. 1)

This truth holds also for the solution of problems in the swamplands of practice. It is through the process of reflecting upon and exploring ourselves and our work environments that we hope to see new relationships and *regard old problems from a new angle*. We hope to create new meaning for our old experiences and thus foster personal and organizational renewal.

There are inumerable ways to reflect and explore, one need only consider the various aspects of thinking (Marzano, R.J, Brandt, R.S., Hughes, C.S., Jones, B.F., Presseisen, B.Z., Rankin, S.C., & Suhor, C., 1988). The following examples, taken from my own journal, will illustrate entries I have used for reflection and exploration: 1) elaborating on personal motivations for conducting a training workshop (this entry led directly to the seven objectives stated on page 2 of this paper); 2) describing what I considered to be an essential component of a teacher certification program (this entry became a letter to the person at a teachers college who was responsible for developing a course of study); 3) articulating the importance of introducing high school students to *psychlogy as science* and not exclusively as *clinical practice* (this entry evolved into a letter to the Science Directorate of the American Psychological Association); 4) writing about attempts by a group of colleagues to formulate a common theme to focus joint, collaborative inquiry (see Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988a, for a description of the consensus building strategy called *the inventio*); 5) designing possible self-evaluation checklists and observation instruments to be used during the act of instruction (see Hofmeister and Lubke, 1990, for many examples based on the effective teaching literature which may be adapted by teachers to meet various instructional observation needs); 6) writing a scripted dialogue between myself and a person with whom I had to resolve a conflict (see Progoff, 1975, for guidance on developing relationships through dialogue scripting); 7) sketching out a *concept map* (semantic network) to clarify the inter-relationships among the chapters of a proposed manuscript (see Novak & Gowin, 1984, for instruction on developing concept maps).

Having *mucked around* and *worked it all out*, the journal keeper is ready to plan for the future.

Steppingstones. It is by means of a Steppingstones entry that we make a statement about the possibilities of our practice, its content and its course. We record our proposed actions and also

our noble intentions. That is, we write a plan that is realistic and possible, but also bold in that it contains those *cultural ideals* we would wish to see more fully embodied in the educational environments of our work. The intention is to lay out steppingstones into the future that are achievable, yet also worthy of our own and others' steps—steppingstones that will inspire the confidence and attention, encourage the support, and amplify the energies of teachers, administrators, therapists, school board members, and other citizens who are the responsible agents of change within our schools.

There are several ways to proceed with the writing of a Steppingstones entry. In my own work, members of collaborative inquiry groups engage in a brief exercise of about 40 minutes in length that has been adapted from an article by Sam Keen (1988) in which he discusses the power of personal myth to guide one's daily actions. In brief, the writing proceeds like this: 1) following several minutes spent in re-reading Summary Log entries and Reflections and Explorations, journal keepers are then prompted to develop a 5 to 10 year timeline into the future marked by significant mileposts (the Steppingstones); and then, 2) expand on the Steppingstones by describing the geographical locale of practice, by characterizing relationships with family, friends and colleagues, by defining the contents of practice, by indicating the attributes of villains and heroes/ heroines who would hinder and help in the future, and by specifying actions (provisional trials) that the journal keeper is willing to take in order to reach the sought after Steppingstones. The annual goals and objectives that professionals of many public agencies are required to write can easily and naturally evolve from this exercise, and may, in fact, be integrated into the journal entry.

With noble intentions and achievable actions in hand, the journal keeper turns to actual engagement with the world, the effects of which are noted as ongoing Daily Log entries. And, so, the cycle of critical inquiry continues.

RULES FOR JOURNAL KEEPING WITHIN COLLABORATIVE ENVIRONMENTS

When used by colleagues as part of an ongoing and collaborative inquiry group, structured journalling can function to help encourage individual and organizational renewal. Because space limitations preclude discussion of such groups, you are encouraged to read the following sources which identify values and activities important to the creation and maintenance of collaborative inquiry environments: Gosswami and Stillman (1987), Grumet (1989), Kemmis and McTaggart (1988a, 1988b), Mohr and MacLean (1987), Nolan and Huber (1989), Reason (1988), Samples (1988), and Sirotnik (1987).

It should be noted in closing, however, that certain principles have proved helpful in fostering cooperative inquiry environments that are valued by participating professionals. We have come to call these principles *the rules of journal keeping within collaborative environments*. They include:

- ✓ Use your journal frequently and over a long enough period of time to allow the patterns and regularities of your professional practice and work environment to emerge. Journal keeping is a discipline.
- ✓ Write in an unpremeditated fashion. That is, make an attempt to give up control of your writing by not planning it. Allow your intuition to make itself known.
- ✓ Write down everything in your journal, even if it seems strange, funny, or inconsequential. Journal entries represent the data of lived experience; record them without judgment or censorship.

- ✓ Write honestly about the things you know deeply; about yourself and your circumstances. Allow yourself to speak what is not ordinarily spoken so that at re-reading you will recognize the truth immediately.
- ✓ Life events are often understood only in retrospect. Consequently, re-reading becomes an important part of journal keeping. Do it often.
- ✓ Keep your journal in a private place. Never read anyone else's journal.
- ✓ In group work, an opportunity is always made to read aloud from journals. There is never any requirement to do so, however. If you feel pressure to read, or discomfort at waiting for others to read, use your journal to help clarify why this is the case. If you do choose to read from your journal, do not discuss or analyze the entry. Simply read it aloud. Opportunities for discussion are also provided.
- ✓ What's read aloud or said in the group, stays in the group.
- ✓ There will be many occasions to help others clarify their thinking with regard to an issue or a problem. At those times it will be beneficial to assume the following attitude: Express genuine interest and concern; without judgment, listen carefully; promote clarity of thinking; subordinate personal desires and agendas to the immediate needs of others; attempt to walk a mile in the other person's shoes, on their behalf, and from their viewpoint.
- ✓ Think globally, act locally.

NOTES

1 I would like to acknowledge my considerable debt to the work of Ira Progoff—gentle man whose Intensive Journal method is an ingenious creation and gift; to Ken Sirotnik, Stephen Kemmis and Robin McTaggart, and Peter Reason—whose clear and compelling thoughts are contained in the references cited below; to Dr. Robert W. Earl, Huntington Beach, California—whose example of life-long inquiry has been an inspiration for many years; and to my *action research colleagues* at Umatilla Education Service District, Pendleton, Oregon—whose reflections and comradeship have nourished my spirit and thought.

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